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State Formation in Comparative Perspectives

Preface

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A symposium was held in Kyoto on January 19–20, 2001, with the theme, Area Studies: Past Experiences and Future Visions. It was part of the activities funded by the COE (Center of Excellence) project entitled “The Making of Regions in Asia and Africa” which have been implemented since 1998 by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) and the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS) as its core institutions.

The symposium consisted of four sessions: Area Studies Institution Building; Africa in Transformation—Environment, Agriculture, and Everyday Life; Sufi Thought and Regional Formations—Ibn Arabi and His School in Asia and Africa; State Formation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa and Asia.

The papers in this special issue of *Southeast Asian Studies* are all by authors who participated in the symposium session on State Formation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa and Asia. They exemplify the theme of the session.

As we all know very well, modern states were fashioned from above as colonial states in many regions of Asia and Africa in the long nineteenth century. Colonial states fundamentally changed life of those who came under their domination, caused deep social and cultural crises, and led in many cases to the rise of nationalism and attempts to make sense of modern states and to take them back into their own hands. Those days are long past now but looking back at the historical trajectories of post-colonial states, it is clear that while some have successfully transformed themselves into national states and are deeply embedded socially and culturally in the societies they rule, many more have failed as national states, have lost what legitimacy they may have had upon independence, and now can only be described as in collapse.

The purpose of the state formation session in the symposium was to examine the formation, transformation and, in some cases, collapse of states in Asia and Africa and to address questions often raised separately, such as Anglo-American colonial and post-colonial hegemonic projects, armed rebellions, military politics, local bosses and militias, and nationalism in the context of state formation. It is only natural, then, that the five essays included in this special issue look at states not only in Southeast Asia but also in other parts of Asia and Africa, and it is our hope that the readers view the essays as comprising a package with the common purpose of addressing the question of state formation in Asia and Africa in comparative perspective.

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